

**Séminaire Réflexions sur les approches d'accompagnement
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**An introduction to Carlos Matus´
Strategic Situational Planning – Planificación Estratégica Situacional (PES)**

The public manager asked the labour union leader to conjugate the verb: to play. Therefore, the union leader conjugated: I play, you play, he/she plays, we play etc. Then the union leader asked the public manager to conjugate the verb: to steer. And the public manager conjugated: I steer.

Geert van Vliet, 2-06-06

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present PES, an approach that aims at providing support to steering in complex settings. PES has been diffused in Latin America for almost 25 years by Carlos Matus¹ and members of his team². The development of this approach took a long way. In the late seventies and early eighties, PES challenged traditional views on public steering. Then, with the fiscal crisis of the State and the almost extinction of the planning ministries in the Latin American region, PES attracted attention, because PES had always claimed that planning was not the monopoly of planning ministries. In fact, PES fundamentally questioned the definition of what planning or steering is and therefore, who the planner or manager really is. By stating that planning is “any reflection preceding or guiding action”, any actor becomes potentially a planner. Since 1990, the approach has been adopted and adapted in a series of local and regional settings in LA (national-local, labour unions, ministries, private sector), with different levels of success. Most of the available material is written in Spanish or Portuguese.

The reason why this approach is worth to be known is threefold:

- For those working on governance issues in LAC, it is certainly useful to be at least familiarised with the main assets and limitations of an approach that challenges - and might add value to – currently used planning and management tools;
- Second, because it is now being taught in several LA universities (Brazil, Colombia) and used by a certain number of national consultants; during the last missions in Brazil, we have found many persons trained in the PES approach and tools.
- Third, because it anticipated recent research and discussions in Europe regarding public steering (third generation steering instruments, dealing with organisational closure).

I. Background

Main issues. The main questions Mr. Carlos Matus and members of his team have tried to answer may be summarised as follows:

- Several Latin-American governments, at several levels of the executive branch, were sincerely engaged in what they then considered essential socio-economic and political reforms to overcome the situation of poverty and to strengthen democracy. However,

¹ Mr. Matus (Chile) started his career as a researcher and teacher on the field of public planning and management at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) in Santiago. He was a member of Salvador Allende's government (1970-1973) and fulfilled the functions of Minister of Economy and Head of the Central Bank. At the coup he was imprisoned with other ex-ministers at the prison of the Island of Dawson (extreme south of Chile). In 1976 he was exiled to Venezuela, where he resumed his work as a UN expert and started developing PES, through the organisation of seminars and the publication of books and reviews (see bibliography). In 1987 he founded ALTADIR, a specialised research and training institute on the field of public steering, with links with similar private (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Manoa Foundation in Colombia, Universidad del Valle en Colombia, several universities in Brazil) and public institutes.

² The author had the opportunity to contribute to the diffusion of PES in Colombia between 1984 and 1990.

most of these intents failed or were abruptly ended. What were the reasons for these failures? Was it only due to external factors? Was it only due to “the opposition”? Might history (and thus destiny) explain it all? Was it only due to the personality of members of government? Which were then the underlying internal factors for failure?

- During Allende’s government, a British consultant called Stafford Beer, who participated in the development of operations research (1940-1945) and its applications in business planning, suggested a series of then strange views on organisation and control. What did he mean to say when he was talking about new forms of peoples control, transparency, systems theory, politic cybernetics, distance regulation, theory of speech and communication, theory of the large organisation?
- Public steering has to do with specific values and norms (therefor the recent term of “good” governance). In which way might alternative steering approaches improve the relationships between State and Civil Society? How to pursue an agenda of political, social and economical reform within a context of an increasing role of the market and a diminishing role for the State? How might new steering approaches contribute to improve the relationships between the three branches of government (transparency, accountability, implementation of what was promised, legitimacy of decisions and laws), and thus contribute to a governability with legitimacy?
- How well is Latin-American leadership prepared to govern and to implement reforms (as opposed to simply administer a state of affairs or let others do so)? How much opposition do unprepared members of government generate? What are the main shortcomings regarding the capacity to govern? How might these shortcomings be resolved?
- What was wrong with the standard public management and planning techniques used in Latin America? In which way did the context where they were applied differ from the context where they were elaborated? In which way does the specificity of the Latin-American socio-economic and political context require specific steering approaches and tools?

Although most public managers (especially in the planning departments) did not believe it, the standard socio-economic planning theory and technique commonly used in the public sector was only one of the many available steering approaches. One of its main limitations is that it does not consider the existence of situations of shared power, where other actors might have as much or even more capacity to steer than we do. In fact, armed forces, corporate business, labour unions, all have their own planning and management techniques. How well do these other actors reach their goals? What can be learned from their steering approaches?

Are there other theoretical frameworks needed to understand public steering in the Latin-American context³? Which steering approaches are suited for adaptation to the context of

³ **Conceptual background.** Like other tools based on systems theory PES is an approach that has integrated and adapted useful elements coming from many different disciplines. The development of PES

the region? Which additional tools should be developed? What is the specificity of public steering (as compared to steering in organisations regulated mainly by the market)? Which steering and management tools should be used in which cases?

In the seventies and eighties political parties and labour unions did not formally prepare their leaders. Nowadays, there are many universities responding to the highest international academic standards, but, with the exception of a few specialised training centres, there are still no “schools of government” or alike in the latinamerican region. For most prominent members of government, learning on the job is the only (and untimely) form of training. How then to develop curricula and expand alternative sources for specific training on the field of public steering?

How might the process of steering be improved? How to organise a mayor's, a governor's, a minister's or a union's leader cabinet? How to create conditions for dialogue with our present and future allies? What instruments of steering might be used? How to create, and communicate our plans?

II. PES: main features

A. Basic suppositions

Situate yourself. It does not make sense to make plans for others. Who is steering? On which side are you on? This is a very basic and most difficult issue.

Steering does only make sense when you are moving. Moving means action. Are you willing to act?

B. Steering: a continuous and reiterative process of calculation made of several “moments”

Understanding the present situation

A situation is a “**view of the world**” (problems, hopes, aspirations, opportunities and utopias) as perceived by the various participants in the steering (group of) actors.

Describe the **problems**: qualitative aspects, quantitative, spatial dimension (where), time dimension (since when? periodicity? etc.). Try to distinguish between structured and unstructured problems. Try to distinguish causal relationships of structured problems. Try to describe as much of possible the different perceptions and aspects of the unstructured

starts from a thorough knowledge of standard theory of public steering (socio-economic planning, public finances) and was feed with a series of approaches like: applied cybernetics, including political cybernetics (...), strategic planning (from the theory of military operations to corporate business planning), political science and the study of power in and around organisations (Mintzberg); the theory of action developed by Sartre and Habermas, the theory of uncertainty and conflict handling developed by Dror, the theory of organisation and control developed by Stafford Beer, the theory of autopoiesis developed by Maturana and Varela.

problems. Try to identify and describe those messy aspects that can be dealt with probability calculations (hard uncertainty).

Differentiate diffuse and well-structured actors.

How to deal with these diffuse “actors”?

Identify all relevant “structured actors”; (see also stakeholders’ matrix analysis). By means of a multi-perspective and reiterative scan, try to identify as many representations of the world as there are actors. Thus, from the perspective of each actor, identify those actors whom:

- Suffer the consequences of the situation
- Are causing the situation
- Are benefiting from the situation
- Want to modify the present situation
- Are able to intervene favourably towards a new situation.
- Are able to intervene unfavourably towards a new situation.
- Are willing to discuss about the situation

Identify those variables they are able to influence, with which effectiveness, when, where (the idea is to have a first feeling of each actor’s space of relative autonomy)?

Identify their formal and informal decision centres (geographical location, rank within the organisation), and decision procedures (long, short, effective and non-effective).

Identify those actors who you might and should invite in your steering exercise.

Who is presently part of “the steering actor”?

What are the **visions of the future (utopias, dreams)** of each actor in our group? What are the aspects of the present situation you want to modify?

How to collect information about the visions, intentions and capacity to intervene of actors whom are not able to participate, or whom you do not want to invite in the steering process? What are the main perceptions and suppositions regarding “diffuse” actors?

What is your present level of autonomy (room for manoeuvre)? Why didn’t you use it? What happened when you went beyond your room for manoeuvre (how did you know the limits)?

What is your experience with previous steering? What did you learn?

Normative moment

Make a preliminary description of the elements of your resource base: natural resources, space, time, power, organisational capacity, material and financial resources, knowledge and access to information.

Which sets of formal or informal rules are limiting your resource basis? Should they be modified? Can they be modified?

Through a reiterative scanning process, describe alternative sets of desired situation and the required action paths, in view of your present resource base (each action path exercises a different demand on your resource base).

Strategic moment.

How sensible are your action paths to adverse actions from third actors?

How sensible are your action paths to uncertainty?

Build alternative scenario taking into account the most sensible events.

How can you reduce the risk of adverse third actor's actions, by inviting them to your steering process? In which way are you able (your resource base) and willing to deal with confrontation (personal behaviour style or style of the organisation)? What are the foreseen costs and benefits of confrontation? Do we have to modify (lower, change) the aspirations? Are there other options? Is it possible to alter the path of action in order to start with actions that generate more legitimacy? In our action path, what is the foreseen evolution of our resource base? And what about the evolution of the resource basis of third actors? (PES dedicates much attention to the ability to build and adapt scenario, in view of changing resource bases).

What is the nature of conflict (personal, political, armed, violent, chronic, and temporary)? What is the object of conflict? Does the object of conflict concern core interests? How to manage the spiral of conflict? Is there space for negotiation? Can you generate space for negotiation? What is your BATNA? PES seminars dedicate much attention to types of conflicts and different methods of conflict management, including the Harvard theory of negotiation⁴.

In which way does this analysis modify the required composition of the steering group?

How can we reduce uncertainty? How can we prepare for and take into account soft and hard forms of uncertainty? (PES provides a special training in applications of the theory of games).

Review the action path reiteratively until agreeing upon the most viable strategy.

Tactic operational moment

This concerns the formal logistical preparation for action (join and apply your resources, organise the activities).

⁴ This approach is very valuable but has some serious shortcomings in the case of inorganic actors and diffuse interests.

C. The organisation of steering.

PES dedicates attention to the organisation of the steering process itself, in particular the **structuring** of governmental cabinets (role of advisers, routine operational activities, fire brigade-crisis unit, communication etc.). Based on a systematic review, PES consultants extract main lessons of experience, and provide advises accordingly.

PES provides inputs for the following aspects:

- Communication (how to contribute to legitimacy by adequate and timely information). In stead of one time thick planning volumes and studies, produce relevant contents and present them the way you esteem more relevant according to the actors to whom it is directed (digitalized, written, radio talk, tv spot or any other form).
- Transparency and accountability (“sistema de rendición y petición de cuentas”, relationship between electoral promises and their implementation).

Monitoring for learning is a fundamental aspect of PES: the governing period of public managers in Latin America is generally very short and therefore there is a need to learn very quickly. PES not only puts attention to the monitoring of the implemented activities but also to the effectiveness of the steering effort itself (how well are decisions implemented, how well is the cabinet functioning, which elements of steering might be abandoned etc.).

D. Fields of application: training and advisory services

PES has been utilized in Venezuela, El Salvador, México, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and Argentina. Examples of situations in which the approach has been developed :

Venezuela (1976-1980): reform of the public planning. First attempts to reorganise the process of public planning (bringing together ministry of planning, ministry of finance and main social actors).

Mexico (1982-1984). Dealing with the renegotiating of foreign debt.

El Salvador (198?-198?). Training of public managers during the military government in El Salvador (special UN assignment in the process of negotiation towards a peace agreement).

Colombia (1984-1998). Training of local leaders in the Colombian Amazon. Training of Fensuagro leaders. Training of several NGO's. Advisory services to candidates, then to the Municipality of Cartagena, the Governors of Risaralda, Huila and of Valle de Cauca, reorganisation of the Ministry of Transportation. Formal training at the Universidad de los Andes and the Universidad del Valle (Cali).

Ecuador (1998-1999). Dealing with natural resource conservation. Elaboration of management plans for 5 natural reserves (GEF/UNDP).

Brazil (1990-1998). Training of labour union leaders, training of candidates for local, state and national elections, organisation of public management in various states. Formal training at several universities.

Argentina (1997). Municipality of Buenos Aires. Advise the municipal government regarding the organisation of municipal planning.

Chile (1997). Modernisation of the Secretary for Planning.
Brazil (2002). Ibama.
Brazil (2006). Municipality of Belém.
Etc...

III. PES and it's relationships to other approaches

Logic framework analysis and ZOPP. Logic framework analysis stems from older military planning techniques and is mainly based on the development of both military operations research during World War II and systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1958). It was formalised by Rand Corporation a think tank in California in 1962, applied by the NASA during the sixties and later in private business corporations like Exxon (early seventies). In the late seventies and eighties the approach was adopted by USAID, the UN system, then by most of the co-operation agencies and by GTZ, who adapted and diffused it as ZOPP. In the nineties it was finally sold as a “new” management tool to IDB and the EU. The following concepts are interesting:

- The use of the broad concept of “problem” instead of a sectorial approach; the needed differentiation between goals, results and means;
- The precision in the definition of actions and results; the possibility to present a project in a wrapped up format;
- The transparency, with which action and its intended results and outcomes is presented and defined, allows for participation and control, etc.
- The possibility given to flexibility and adaptation.

The limitations are also known. One limitation stems from its misuse rather than from the instrument itself: the original idea was that of a flexible-planning tool, able to deal with uncertainty. Most agencies have transformed it in a fixed and therefor rather useless blueprint, giving the illusion of control.

Another limitation, of which many of the users seem unaware, stems from the limited range of problems where the instrument may be applied. One of the basic steps of the approach is problem analysis. It is supposed that all problems may be analysed in terms of linear causal relationships. This is certainly possible for so called structured problems, where the universe of variables and their relationships is known. But this exercise is highly risky in the case of messy (unstructured or complex) problems, where we do not even know (and will probably never know) all the variables of the problem and where circular causal relationships blur the analysis and therefor the reflection upon action. In many occasions misuse of the instrument may be observed, which then results in serious implementation problems for the executing agency, the financing agency and the intended beneficiaries of the project.

Logic framework analysis is useful at a basic operational level of planning (project or program level), but is scarcely adapted to the analysis and resolution of global or

complex problems of a higher (governmental or society) level, where many (contradictory) dimensions and the interests of large diffuse groups (“public opinion”) have to be taken into account. Another main shortcoming comes from the fact that it is heavily dependent on the existence of consensus. It does not take into consideration the existence of conflict and the intervention capacity of other actors (“we produced a sound and legitimate plan with a truly participatory approach, but the others would not let us implement it”). Usually, the organisation and the outcomes of logic framework analysis and ZOPP events are highly dependent on the facilitators. Once the euphoria of the event has passed, participants return to their daily routines without coloured cards.

The Altadir Method for People’s Planning (Método Altadir de Planificación Popular (MAPP)). MAPP has been developed by ALTADIR to create a bridge between PES and ZOPP. It adds strategic considerations to the tool. The application is limited to relatively simple and structured problems, at lower levels of organization, in cases where consensus is not foreseen. Usually ALTADIR does not facilitate planning events but trains as many members as possible from base groups in the use of the planning technique: actors should plan by themselves.

PES and MAS. PES has been developed before the emergence of Multi agent systems thinking. As far as I know, there has been no experience that puts these two approaches to work together. As a practitioner of PES I am convinced that the MAS approach might provide new insights to PES. The formal modeling of actions from the perspectives of different actors would be very useful as a complement to the role-games and “situation analysis rooms” usually applied during PES training. The possibility to “visually represent” how these different views of the world, and different logics of action will modify the parameters of the global situation is particularly challenging. MAS modeling may also contribute to the acceleration of learning through the possibility to run several different scenarios in a very short time. The strategic reflection on power, strategy and tactics on which PES is grounded may in turn enrich MAS approaches.

Conclusion: relevance of PES, its limitations and side effects

Improvisation versus formal steering. Any steering method involves different levels of effort. Steering itself is an activity that exercises a considerable demand on the resource basis of the steering actor. It can exhaust time, one of the scarcest resources for many organisations. Sometimes actors may be better off with improvisation or just their own informal forms of steering.

Any training in formalised steering can have a negative impact on the improvisation capacity of an organisation. The costs and benefits of formalised steering must therefore be evaluated and justified and formalised steering methods must at least compete with improvisation. PES must be submitted to this same basic cost benefit analysis.

Improvise whenever you can. If you really need to steer formally then consider the following. If the problem is structured and probability of consensus is high, use ZOPP or similar methods. If the problem is structured but the probability of consensus is low, use

MAPP. If the problems are messy and probability for consensus is high, use search conference or similar techniques. If the problems are messy and probability for consensus is low, then consider PES. Do not suppose consensus where it does not exist or simplify problems when that is not appropriate. Do not create or suppose conflicts where there is consensus, or suppose a mess when a simple action can do it all. Adapt the tool to the situation and not the way around. Always preserve improvisation as an alternative...

Fields of application of different management and steering tools			
Probability of consensus		High	Low
X=Ratio between added value of formalised steering/and added value of improvisation	If $X < 1$ improvise		
Type of problems : structured		ZOPP	MAPP
Type of problems : messy		Future Search Conference, Interactive planning etc.	PES

PES is relevant in order to prepare for action in messy and conflictive situations.

PES questions a series of paradigms with which many public managers have been educated. During the seminars and consultancies, some participants accept to have their paradigms challenged. Others do not.

As stated before, PES should be only used in the situations it was intended for. Several cases of abusive applications have been observed and caused the necessary irritations.

Trained people have had the tendency to believe that an approach that takes into consideration conflict and complexity can effectively resolve these aspects (“we will help you overcome the challenges of this centuries increasing complexity” etc.). Whatever the pretensions of some other approaches in the same fields (Le management dans la complexite, Global Management, Santa Fe center for the study of Complexity etc.), complexity, uncertainty and conflict might be better dealt with, they may increase the intelligibility of a complex situation, but complexity will continue to exist, and a more modest attitude is recommended.

Some PES trainers and trainees have had an unforeseen tendency to an ultra formalisation, unending written calculations and scenari, abuse of jargon, elements which are all against the intentions of the approach (which are, to assist decision makers, and to be useful to the process of steering).

PES was generated as a critical answer to the then overwhelming “standard public management” techniques and rituals. How to avoid that PES it self becomes a “standard technique” with its rituals, its formats, it’s believers and its followers, now that it is gaining some signs of interest? What news is there on the horizon?

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